

DRW Statement in Opposition to AB305/SB330

June 14, 2023

Disability Rights Wisconsin, together with disability advocacy organizations across the state, opposed the creation of the Special Needs Scholarship Program. The program is fraught with harm both for students with disabilities who use the vouchers and those who do not. Those who use the vouchers give up their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and have no recourse if the school later decides the student needs more support than the school is willing to give. Those who remain in the public schools, which are required to serve students of all abilities, end up in schools that are increasingly stressed for resources while serving a larger proportion of students with high support needs. DRW regularly serves families whose students are negatively impacted by both sides of this equation.

Even though the Special Needs Scholarship Program is already state-funded at 100% for students with fewer needs, and at least 90% reimbursement for students with more significant needs, the indexing mechanism in AB305/SB330 would result in an 18% increase in the funding for the standard special needs voucher. Not only is this unnecessary funding, well above an inflationary increase for a program that does not serve all students; the funding is administered as an aid reduction to the home district. Meanwhile, it has been announced that special education categorical aid will only reimburse public schools at a 33.3% rate, and that the spendable per-pupil increases for public schools will be considerably below the rate of inflation – in other words, public schools will be taking another cut.

Disability Rights Wisconsin opposes AB305/SB330 and strongly recommends that instead of increasing funding for less-accountable private schools, that we appropriately fund the public schools where we educate the vast majority of our students with disabilities, and where they have rights under IDEA. Since the Special Needs Scholarship program is funded at above 90%, it would be only fair to fund our public school students with disabilities to 90% as well.